

July 25, 2005

The Honorable Dorcas R. Hardy
2005 White House Conference on Aging
4350 East-West Highway
Bethesda, MD 20814

Dear Ms. Hardy:

I am writing you to urge you to address the issue of senior nutrition and hunger at the White House Conference on Aging and the conference-sponsored events.

As a member of the Policy Committee of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging you will be a leader in determining the issues that are discussed about seniors in the coming months. As you know, many of the recommendations from the conference will be used to make important policy decisions in the future.

America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network is the nation's largest anti-hunger organization with over 200 food banks and food rescue organizations serving nearly every county in the United States. America's Second Harvest is very committed to the goal of ending hunger in America. Seniors, who are an extremely vulnerable group, are especially of interest. Currently, more than 3 million of the 23.3 million low-income Americans our network feeds each year are 65 years or older.¹

Research clearly demonstrates that seniors who experience hunger are at risk for serious health problems. Hunger increases their risk for stroke, exacerbates pre-existing ill health conditions, limits the efficacy of many prescription drugs, increases the risk for infection and disease, and may affect brain chemistry increasing the incidence of depression and isolation. According to studies by the American Dietetic Association, every dollar spent on nutrition screening and intervention for seniors saves \$3.25 in health costs later on.² The senior population—currently at a record high of 13 percent of the population—is growing rapidly—and is expected to make up 20 percent of the population by 2030.³ Therefore it is absolutely essential that the issue of senior nutrition be addressed at the White House Conference on Aging.

¹ 2001 Hunger Study, America's Second Harvest

² www.aafp.org

³ www.aoa.gov

Despite the fact that the senior population is growing rapidly, federal nutrition programs that are available, in theory, to elders often fall far short of reaching this vulnerable population. For instance, only 30.4 percent of seniors eligible for the Food Stamp Program receive benefits—compared to the national average of 61.5 percent.⁴ Reasons for low participation among the elderly include the social stigma of receiving federal aid, misinformation and confusion about food stamp rules, lack of access to the food stamp office, lack of transportation, misunderstanding regarding eligibility rules for legal immigrants, and difficulties finding a Food Stamp Official who speaks the native language of the applicant. Moreover, other initiatives, such as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), Meals-on-Wheels and Congregate Meal Programs are often unavailable in many communities or have long waiting lists for services due to inadequate funding. As a result, many vulnerable seniors find that they must skimp on nutrition in order to meet other pressing needs. For example, according to research by the Urban Institute, 1.9 million seniors must choose between buying food and buying needed medicine.⁵

The issues of nutrition and hunger fit well into your agenda item of Health and Long Term Living and its sub goal of Health Lifestyles, Prevention, and Disease Management because healthy food and nutrition are crucial for seniors to maintain healthy lifestyles, manage and prevent chronic diseases, and foster long-term independence. I strongly urge the Committee to recommend the inclusion of senior hunger and the federal response to this problem on the agenda for the White House Conference on Aging.

Thank you for your deep commitment to helping seniors in America and for your leadership on their critical issues. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Doug O'Brien, Vice President of Public Policy and Research, at (312) 263-2303 if there is anything we can do to provide you with information in preparation of the conference or otherwise support you in your efforts to help seniors and feed hungry Americans.

Sincerely,



Robert H. Forney
President and Chief Executive Officer

⁴ www.frac.org

⁵ www.uwcnm.org